Book Proposal materials by Jeremy Wallach

Field of Study: Ethnomusicology, Popular culture

Table of Contents

- Book Proposal
- Response to Reader’s Report
BOOK PROPOSAL

WORKING TITLE: MODERN NOISE AND ETHNIC ACCENTS:
INDONESIAN POPULAR MUSIC IN A TIME OF CHANGE, 1997-2001

Jeremy Wallach
Department of Popular Culture
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, Ohio 43403-0226
(419) 372-8204
fax (419) 372-2577
jeremyw@bgnet.bgsu.edu

Modern Noise and Ethnic Accents is the first book-length, comprehensive study of current Indonesian popular music that integrates ground-level ethnographic research with insights drawn from contemporary cultural theory. As a result of its emphasis on concrete sites and practices, the study moves beyond timeworn conceptual dichotomies (such as “resistance” versus “domination” or “global” versus “local”) and analyzes in detail the complex affective politics of identification and exclusion which characterizes responses to contemporary popular music genres among Indonesians from different social classes and ethnic backgrounds.

I. Primary Audience and Marketability

The primary audience for the proposed volume consists of ethnomusicologists and cultural anthropologists who specialize in the societies of Southeast Asia. This audience also includes ethnomusicologists of popular musics around the world. Beyond these core constituencies, the broad potential readership for this work includes Southeast Asia specialists in other disciplines, anthropologists exploring issues of globalization, popular culture, modernity and identity, media studies/communications scholars, popular music historians, and performance scholars.

II. Potential Classroom Applications

The classroom applicability of the proposed book benefits from two complementary pedagogical trends: courses on modern Asian politics and history have increasingly addressed popular culture and the role of the mass media, while classes on media and popular culture have attempted to incorporate “global” perspectives that take into account contemporary developments in non-Western cultures. Similarly, courses in ethnomusicology and world music now direct increasing attention to the world’s popular musics in addition to traditional forms. In fact, portions of the proposed work, in both published and manuscript form, have in fact already been assigned to students at universities in Ireland, Canada and the United States.
The proposed book will be accessibly written, and would be useful in an Introduction to Southeast Asia class as well as in introductory classes on globalization, popular culture studies, cultural anthropology, and world music. In addition, the book is ideal for use in advanced seminars on music ethnography, Indonesian music, qualitative media studies, and the anthropology of complex societies. It is also my hope that this book will be utilized in surveys of the contemporary Muslim world.

III. Relevance to the University of Wisconsin Press

The proposed book project was invited for inclusion in the UW Press’s new book series on Southeast Asian Studies. As an example of new, cutting-edge research into music and culture in a major Southeast Asian nation that focuses on that nation’s (in the words of the Series’ Call for Manuscripts) “relations with the rest of the world in a globalizing context,” this project fits well with the mission of this book series. Moreover, the proposed book could also be promoted via other relevant subject areas, such as popular culture and media studies, in which the Press is active.

IV. Previous Publication

Small portions of the proposed work have been published as a book chapter and in an academic journal article. No difficulty is foreseen in obtaining permission from the publishers to reprint this material in a book. The present proposal is being submitted in response to an invitation from Professor R. Anderson Sutton of the University of Wisconsin Press. The manuscript on which it is based is not currently under review by another publisher.

V. Main Argument and Broader Relevance

This study reveals that access to globally circulating musics and technologies has neither homogenized nor extinguished local music-making in Indonesia, but rather has provided Indonesians with a wide range of creative possibilities for exploring their existential condition in a time of political transition and heated debate over Indonesia’s future as a multiethnic, democratizing nation in a complex, globalizing world. Moreover, the book argues that the unofficial, multicultural nationalism implicit in nearly all national Indonesian popular musics provides a viable alternative to the various forms of extremism and exclusivism (religious, regional, ethnic) which continue to threaten national integration and democracy in post-New Order Indonesia.

I believe the proposed book project will serve a larger purpose in the context of current public debates concerning relations between the United States and the Muslim world. By presenting the diversity, aspirations, and creativity of young people in a Muslim-majority nation, Modern Noise and Ethnic Accents will counteract stereotypical American perceptions of a monolithic Muslim culture characterized by intolerance and violent opposition to the West and modernity. Through its in-depth analysis of popular music forms and their cultural significance in contemporary Indonesia, the proposed book will
demonstrate that the everyday reality for most Indonesian youth is far more complex and
ambivalent.

VI. List of Suggested Readers

Professor Benedict R. O’G. Anderson*
Cornell University
Center for Southeast Studies
116 Kahin Center
640 Stewart Avenue
Ithaca, NY 14850
(607) 277-3249
bra2@cornell.edu

Professor James Siegel*
Cornell University
Department of Anthropology
209 Kahin Center
640 Stewart Avenue
Ithaca, NY 14850
(607) 256-7283
jts4@cornell.edu

Professor Clifford Geertz*
School of Social Science
Institute for Advanced Study
Princeton, NJ 08540
(609) 734-8251
geertz@ias.edu

Professor Steven Feld*
University of New Mexico
Departments of Anthropology and Music
Anthropology Room 144
Albuquerque, NM 87131
505-277-1539,
feld@unm.edu

Professor Michael Bodden
Department of Pacific and Asian Studies
University of Victoria
Victoria, BC
Canada
(250)721-6272
mbodden@uvic.ca
*has read an earlier version of the manuscript.

VII. Related Works and Online Applications

The sole book-length study comparable to that proposed here is Craig Lockard's *Dance of Life: Popular Music and Politics in Southeast Asia.* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998). This work contains one chapter containing a general overview of popular music in Indonesia, chiefly based on secondary sources.

As the first major work on Indonesian popular music based on primary research, an online, multimedia component of this project would be most appropriate. A CD-ROM or Web site would provide the opportunity to publish color photographs, artwork, and sound recording files that would otherwise not be included in a printed work.
February 24, 2005

Robert Mandel, Director
University of Wisconsin Press
1930 Monroe Street, Third Floor
Madison, Wisconsin 53711

RE: Modern Noise book manuscript

Dear Professor Mandel:

The purpose of this letter is to acknowledge my receipt of both reader reports for the book manuscript, "Modern Noise and Ethnic Accents: Indonesian Popular Music in a Time of Change (1997-2001)" and, per your request, to formally respond to the contents of these reports.

I should state at the outset that I am pleased that both readers have recommended the manuscript for publication, albeit only after it undergoes revisions big and small.

In general, the reviewers' suggestions for improving the manuscript are both reasonable and limited to specific aspects of the text. The comments by reviewer Sean Williams, who chose not to remain anonymous, will be discussed first.

I believe that many of Dr. Williams' comments can be easily addressed. For example, Williams claims I employ "archaic" spellings of the names of key figures in Indonesian history. In fact, the spellings that appear in the manuscript are those used currently by The Jakarta Post, Indonesia's foremost English language newspaper, except that the paper uses "Sukarno" instead of "Soekarno" (except when printing the name of Jakarta's Soekarno-Hatta airport). I will change the spelling of this name in the manuscript to match the Post's spelling, and will add a footnote early in the text that addresses the spellings of proper names, indicating that I have taken my lead from The Jakarta Post.

Much of Dr. Williams' reader's report consists of general comments and illuminating asides that I will give due consideration. However, there are also some specific problems she points out in the text, including a perceived lack of smooth transitions between chapters and a perceived (though totally unintended!) "contempt" expressed in the writing for ethnomusicologists. I will endeavor to fully address these concerns when revising the manuscript by adding new concluding paragraphs to some chapters to introduce the chapters that follow, and by eliminating any statements in the text that could be interpreted as disparaging toward ethnomusicology or ethnomusicologists. (I certainly have no wish to alienate a significant portion of the book's core audience!) I
have also consulted the three books — by Spiller, Weintraub, and Williams — Williams recommends in her remarks and will cite them in the revised document. In short, I agree with this reviewer when she suggests that her main concerns about the manuscript can “be addressed with relatively little angst on the part of the author.”

Dr. Williams was also kind enough to include with her report a marked copy of the manuscript which not only provided substantive, specific comments on its content, but also brought to my attention a few irksome typographical errors that had somehow managed to escape detection during numerous prior rounds of copyediting.

While the tone of the second, anonymous reader report occasionally seemed acerbic, most of the suggestions for revision he or she offered were thoughtful, self-contained, and primarily concerned with relatively small and fixable theoretical and methodological matters. I am grateful for the obvious thoroughness and attention to detail with which this reviewer wrote her/his remarks, the vast majority of which I have found illuminating and useful.

In response to this reader’s concerns, I plan to clarify the distinction I make between concrete sites of (ongoing) musical production/reception activities and more temporally bounded, singular performance events in the book’s overall organization. I also have consulted and plan to cite some Indonesian-language scholarly sources relevant to my study, though such sources are rare and often highly idiosyncratic. Other changes I plan to make in response to this reviewer’s comments include rewriting the book’s preface and reorganizing and lengthening the descriptive overview of musical categories found in Chapter One. I will also adjust the language of the book to reflect the empirical limitations of the study, i.e., not generalizing about all Indonesians based on my experiences in urban Java and Bali, and, conversely, using greater caution when drawing conclusions about Indonesian national culture based on specifically Javanese or Sundanese cultural beliefs and values. Williams’ remarks also allude to this occasional slippage in the text, and I plan to correct it.

There are a few places where I must respectfully disagree with the anonymous reader’s comments: I would maintain that the evolution of dangdut music from a style known as orkes Melayu has been widely accepted by dangdut music scholars and dangdut enthusiasts alike (though I will be sure to cite explicitly in the text earlier works that point out this line of descent); I also believe it is worthwhile to point out that familiar music genre labels in English are given distinctly Indonesian pronunciations by Jakarta youth (though I will try not to belabor this point and will clarify its larger significance).

I also respectfully disagree with the reader’s accusation that I get “carried away with banal ethnographic description”—the details one reader finds fascinating and enriching (such as the manuscript’s elaborate accounts of multitrack recording processes, which this reader appreciates but others [mostly anthropologists] find rather long) another considers banal. For example, students in my current graduate seminar were fascinated by the study’s descriptions of how music is tried out and purchased in Indonesian cassette stalls, while this reader apparently found these descriptions superfluous. Finally, there
are various points in the text where the reader requests additional evidence for the interpretations I propose for various cultural phenomena. While I certainly will make every effort to provide this evidence as I revise the document, if no such concrete “proof” can be found in my field notes, I am inclined to nonetheless keep these interpretations in the text and leave it up to the reader to accept or reject them, or simply to regard them as interesting, plausible takes on the possible significance of a particular cultural form or practice. Many of the same arguments criticized by the anonymous reviewer were highlighted in the text by Williams as especially on-target and intriguing.

Despite the reservations noted above, the anonymous reader report emphatically points out the “valuable and unique contributions” of the book to the study of Indonesian music and society, including the novel insights it provides into youth cultural practices, music and social class, the cross-fertilization of popular music genres, and recording studio practices.

While there was surprisingly little overlap between the two reviewers’ specific comments, two major areas of agreement (in addition to the already discussed cautioning against overgeneralization) concerned the book’s treatment of gender issues and its use of the theories of anthropologist Greg Urban. I plan to more convincingly and accessibly establish the relevance of Urban’s work to my overall project in the revised draft of the manuscript, and will also add a substantive discussion of gender ideology and Indonesian popular music in the opening chapter to introduce and frame the subsequent discussions on this topic in the book’s middle and later chapters. Lastly, in response concerns expressed by both reviewers, I intend to select an attractive new title that better represents the contents of the proposed book.

In light of the previously discussed comments and suggestions, my plan for revision of the manuscript is as follows:

March through mid-April 2005: Consult additional sources and rewrite major sections of document, including the preface and introductory chapter.

April-July 2005: Complete all substantive and minor revisions to the text.

I will deliver a fully revised document to the Press on or before August 1, 2005.

After carefully reading through all the reviewers’ comments, I am further convinced that the proposed book would attract a wide readership indeed among scholars in a variety of disciplines who work in contemporary Southeast Asia. Additionally, I believe the book’s innovative approach, engaging writing style, and timely subject matter (all three of which were remarked favorably upon by the reviewers) will interest political scientists, communication scholars, anthropologists, cultural studies researchers, ethnomusicologists, qualitative sociologists, and media theorists working in a wide range of geographical and historical settings, not just in modern Indonesia and Southeast Asia. Indeed, the book will be highly relevant to a growing, diverse group of scholars whose
research leads them to confront issues of identity, globalization, mass media, technology, popular music, nationalism, and youth culture.

Similarly, I would suggest that the proposed book will not only make a valuable addition to undergraduate and graduate courses on Southeast Asian politics, music, history, and culture (previous publications of mine have, in fact, already been used in such classes), but will also be utilized productively in courses across university curricula that engage with the theoretical issues noted above. In short, I expect the book to capture the interest of a large academic and general audience as a useful (and entertaining) scholarly resource as well as an effective teaching tool.

It is an honor to have one’s work considered for publication by the University of Wisconsin Press. Thank you very much for this opportunity to respond to the manuscript reviewers’ comments, and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about my proposed book project and/or the timetable for revision outlined in this letter.

Sincerely yours,

Jeremy Wallach
Assistant Professor
Department of Popular Culture
Bowling Green State University

(419) 372-8204
eremyw@bignet.bgsu.edu